

2004 END OF SESSION REPORT TO THE 34th DISTRICT



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April 2004

Dear neighbor,

I hope this note finds you well. I'm glad to be back in Seattle after a short but intense session that kept us on our toes day in and day out.

Inside this newsletter you'll find information on the Legislature's achievements. While I do believe more could have been done, we did make significant progress in my initial priorities: education, health care and job creation.

Kids are always way up on my list and this year I am happy to say that we passed Legislation on several issues that directly affect children.

I am particularly pleased with our accomplishments in education. An education reform package sent to the governor by the Legislature includes renovations to our state's assessment standards that I introduced and improved funding for low-income schools.

Many of you will want more information about specific issues, and I encourage you to contact me by e-mail, telephone or letter.

Thank you for giving me the honor of serving as your representative. I hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,

Joe McDermott
State Representative

Washington kids: our pride, our future, our main concern

We started this session with a long list of things to get done and problems to solve, but one of our goals was to make real, tangible differences for Washington children.

a) Educating Kids:

The governor recently signed a package of much needed education reforms that include changes to the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL), and the Learning Assistance Program (LAP).

WASL:

Starting only four years from now students will have to pass the WASL in major subject areas, such as math, reading, and writing.

Different people have different skills, as well as different ways of demonstrating knowledge. We have to help students prepare and reach the achievement goals that we've set, taking their differences into account.

This is why I sponsored the reforms to the WASL, to ensure that students who struggle on testing day, or are not native English speakers, have every opportunity to pass the test and graduate.



What are the changes?:

- Certificate of Academic Achievement required for graduation beginning in 2008
- Certificate of Academic Achievement earned by passing the WASL in Reading, Writing, and Mathematics in 2008 and adding Science in 2010
- Authorizing retake opportunities and alternative assessments
- A student plan that outlines high school graduation requirements

This legislation keeps the promise of education reform first made ten years ago and it opens avenues for parents to get involved with their children's learning.

LAP:

The Learning Assistance Program was created to assist under-achieving students in kindergarten through ninth grade that need extra support in reading, mathematics or writing. Schools with low test scores are eligible for additional funding.

The problem was that once test scores improved, the funding was taken away, which would then result in test scores dropping again. I introduced legislation in the House to solve this problem.

The new law:

- Refocuses the program so that schools that show improvements are not penalized with the loss of funding; and

- Adds accountability measures to the program to insure its effectiveness.

This solution puts an end to the cycle of decline and will help make both students and schools more successful.

b) Healing Kids:

How much sense does it make to balance the budget on the backs of children of low-income families? That's what would have happened if we hadn't stopped last session's imposed premiums on low-income Medicaid recipients from taking effect this year.

In short, this would have resulted in 20,000 children losing health coverage.

When a kid gets sick and doesn't receive timely medical attention, a chronic series of consequences follow:

- the child misses school
- the condition worsens
- the kid is taken to the emergency room
- the tag price ends up being higher

None of that has to take place, which is why this year we eliminated premiums for families up to 150 percent above the Federal Poverty Level, as shown in the chart below.

We also increased support for community clinics by \$2.5 million and boosted grants to hospitals by \$10 million so they are partially compensated for treating the uninsured.

Family of 3:	Annual Income	Monthly premium for each child's health coverage (up to 3 kids)
Under 150% FPL	Less than \$23,505	\$0
150 - 200% FPL	\$23,505 - \$31,340	\$10
200 - 250% FPL	\$31,341 - \$39,175	\$15

c) *Feeding Kids:*

The Hunger and Poverty Center released a study as recent as 2002, which reported that Washington State was the second hungriest state in the nation. That year more than 100,000 Washington households experienced hunger firsthand, and as many as 300,000 other families saw times when they feared hunger might be just days away.

The truth is that many children are going to bed every night on an empty stomach. How can we expect these kids to perform well in school if they don't know where their next meal is coming from?

This session we took remedial actions. The new law directs that:



- School districts with schools serving kindergarten through grade four, where 25 percent of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunches, must implement a school-lunch program.
- Districts with schools that have summer academic, enrichment or remedial programs, in which 50 percent of students qualify for free or reduced lunches, must implement a summer food-service program.



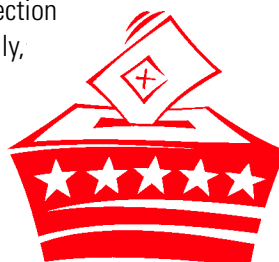
- Schools with existing lunch programs must implement a summer food program by the year 2005. Other schools must implement a summer food program after setting up a lunch program.

A new primary for Washington:

As you know, one imperative issue was replacing our state's blanket primary, because the system we had was ruled unconstitutional by the courts.

It wasn't easy and it raised a lot of controversy. After long debates and drafting many versions, the bill that passed the Legislature establishes that the top two primary candidates will move on to the general election. However, the bill also provided that if that primary was thrown out by the courts it would be replaced by a Montana-style primary. The problem I see with the top-two system is that in the general election we may end up with two candidates of the same party, in which case members of any other party would be disenfranchised. Further, third parties would virtually be eliminated from the general election.

As you may have heard already, the governor vetoed the top-two sections of the bill leaving Washington with a Montana-style primary. In this primary voters select the ballot of one major political party and vote in that party's primary. Which ballot a voter selects is not made public or shared with the party. This preserves choice in the general election – which has higher voter turnout than the primary – because each major party's nominee will be on the general election ballot. Additionally, independent and minor party candidates would hold nominating



conventions, and then their qualifying candidates would go directly to the general election ballot.

As we face a new primary in September, it is important to remember that this legislation just affects the primary, and the general election ballot in November will look just the same as it always has.

Preserving Passenger-Only Ferries:

We adopted a Supplemental Transportation Budget that leaves passenger-only ferry funding untouched.



The Senate had proposed a supplemental transportation budget which would have cut a total of \$2.4 million from the passenger-only ferry service from Vashon to Downtown Seattle, but House Democrats refused to accept it. Such a cut would have eliminated the PO Ferry within 12 months.

I live in West Seattle and I know how crucial the ferry service is to Vashon Island. It doesn't make any sense to get rid of it and the subsequent result would be worsened traffic due to thousands of additional cars poured onto already overcrowded streets.

Under current law, the Vashon-Seattle Passenger-Only Ferry is funded for the full biennium of the budget, and I will continue working so that is funded into the future.

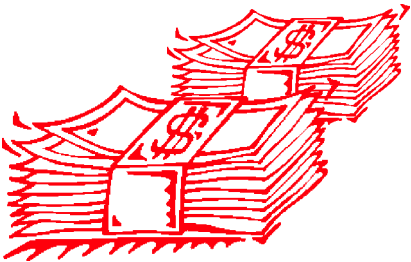
Representative

Joe McDermott

The 2004 Supplemental Budget:

The supplemental budget adopted by the Legislature addressed the need to grow the economy through health care, education and jobs. The budget passed by the House reflected these priorities. Even though the process of coming to agreement between Senate Republicans and House Democrats was difficult, the final budget still supports the original House values.

The result is a bipartisan, carefully-crafted adjustment to the biennial budget in which we saved at least \$61 million. The alterations made to the budget restore some of the deep cuts to the health safety net, make intelligent investments, do not include any new taxes and still keep \$300 million in reserve.



Smoking Ban

You may remember I introduced a bill to ban smoking in indoor public places such as restaurants, bars, taverns, and bowling alleys, so that all employees would be protected from second-hand smoke and to have uniform smoking policies throughout Washington.

Unfortunately, my bill failed to receive Legislative approval this year. But since the end of the session, two initiatives have been introduced to the Secretary of State Office.

One of them would continue to allow smoking in most places where it is currently allowed, while the other one, which is very similar to my bill, would ban smoking from restaurants, bars and bowling alleys across the state.



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